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WEEKLY COLUMN

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Notes from the Georgia State Senate

Senate makes strides for education, schools

By Senator Bill Heath



It was back to work last week at the Georgia Senate, as we began the second half of the 2006 session. This is the hectic portion of the 40-day legislative session, where we roll up our sleeves and really get down to the people's business. Last week was another big week for education in our state, as the Republican-led Senate passed legislation that will help our teachers, principals and especially our children.

One of the biggest stories is that we have finally passed a big piece of the Governor's 2006 education plan, Senate Bill 390, which is known as the *Classrooms First for Georgia Act*. The bill would require that every local school system spend a minimum of 65 percent of its total operating funds on direct classroom expenditures, beginning with Fiscal Year 2008. These expenditures include classroom teachers, personnel, instruction supplies, field trips, music, athletics and private institutions for special education.

On last Thursday, the Senate agreed to the House changes to Senate Bill 390, which constitutes final passage of the bill. Governor Perdue stated that making classroom spending a priority and providing our hard-working teachers with more classroom resources will give our students the best opportunity to

reach their fullest potential, and I agree with this. The legislation now awaits the Governor's signature to become law. Many of the schools in our district already meet the criteria of the "65 percent" bill, but other school systems in the State do not, and this is why I support the measure.

In other education-related news, the Senate unanimously passed Senate Bill 288, on Wednesday, to enact the *Grade Integrity Act of 2006*. The measure will forbid classroom teachers from being required, coerced, intimidated or disciplined in any manner to change the grade of a student. Additionally, Senate Bill 424 passed last week, granting up to five excused absences to children of military personnel prior to deployment or who are on leave from an overseas combat zone. Both of these bills now go to the House for consideration.

The state Senate and Governor Perdue have made a promise to you that we will do everything in our power to improve our state's public schools. I am very happy to say that by passing these bills, we are making great strides in improving the education our children receive in Georgia's schools.

Remember, I work for you and your concerns are my concern. Until next week...

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Sen. Bill Heath represents the 31st Senate District, which includes all of Haralson and Polk Counties and parts of Bartow and Paulding Counties. He may be reached at 404.463.1361, or by email at billheath@billheath.net.